

**Children's Bureau
Child and Family Services Reviews
Promising Approaches**

I. Identifying Information

Promising Approach:	Delaware's Child Welfare Staff Training and Retention Initiatives
Agency Sponsor:	Delaware Department of Services to Children Youth and Their Families
State:	Delaware
Target Population:	Child welfare caseworkers and supervisors
Resources Required/Funding Source:	The new initiatives are funded through the Department's personnel budget.
Length of Operation:	1997 to present

II. Description of Promising Approach:

Staff retention is one of the challenges facing child welfare agencies, which typically experience significant staff turnover in short periods of time. The Delaware Department of Services to Children, Youth, and Their Families has put in place procedures for stabilizing their workforce, building on a legislative initiative enacted in response to several child fatalities.

The Child Abuse Prevention Act of 1997 established systems designed to improve the training and retention of State child welfare caseworkers, using an "overhire" process that supports new staff development. Through these changes and other new procedures, the department is hiring faster, providing more staff training, and improving staff management.

Specifically, the department now operates under the following personnel procedures:

- **New minimum educational requirements and professional categories:** The educational requirements for prospective child welfare caseworkers were increased by the legislation; candidates now must have a bachelor's degree in a field closely related to child welfare.

The legislation also created two new job categories. The Senior Family Services Specialist position is a second-tier job category, with a corresponding salary increase; new caseworkers are eligible for promotion into the new category after 1 year of service. The Family Crisis Therapist position, a new top-tier job category, provides experienced caseworkers the opportunity for an additional promotion and salary increase.

- **New caseload standard:** The Child Abuse Prevention Act of 1997 established a new caseload standard equivalent to two cases more than the Child Welfare League of America-recommended standard. Under the legislation, new caseworker positions are automatically created when the number of cases increases to 10 percent above that standard.
- **“Overhire” pool:** The legislation also enabled the department to create up to 15 “overhire” positions. They did so by putting two people into one budget position. This was possible given the current staff turnover that typically resulted in the agency underspending its personnel budget. The overstaffing allows the agency to focus on training new staff who do not carry a caseload for about six weeks and then receive cases slowly. While being trained, new staff also are mentored by an experienced caseworker; they typically manage at least one case under the mentor’s supervision.
- **Enhanced supervisory training and performance expectations:** To support the goal of reducing staff turnover, supervisors receive training designed to help them support their staff while being accountable for results. In addition, each supervisor has an individual performance plan that sets expectations regarding staff turnover and provides them with additional training to help them meet those targets.

Following implementation of the new procedures, the department’s staff turnover rate has been reduced from approximately 48 percent to about 16 percent. In addition, the department has reduced its “backlog of cases,” or those not being investigated within the required timeframe, from 40 percent, at the time of passage of the Child Abuse Prevention Act of 1997, to 10 percent or less today.

III. Contact for More Information:

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